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MYSTIC
Tony Bedard
Aaron Lopresti
Matt Ryan
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Giselle

never wanted ultimate power, but fate had other plans for her. Born on a world ruled by seven magical guilds, Giselle Villard disdained the mystic arts. She partied night after night while her elder sister, Genevieve, rose through the ranks of the powerful Nouveau Guild.

Then came the ceremony where Genevieve was to inherit her guild's Eternal Spirit - the ghost of a previous master possessing the arcane wisdom of the ages. In the audience, a mysterious stranger branded a mark of power onto Giselle's right palm. This red and yellow Sigil forced the eternal spirits out of all seven Guild Masters and bound them to Giselle. Granted vast magical might, Giselle reluctantly became the most powerful Mystic ever known.

Recently, Giselle disappeared from Eiress, much to the dismay of Skitter - her talking pet who is much more than he appears to be. Trapped in a prehistoric realm without magic, Giselle joined a local warlord, the Sachem of Vardan Ree, in attacking the village of the dreaded mud-hunters. Giselle quickly learned she'd been duped - the Sachem was an evil liar, while the mud-hunter chief, Atook, sought to protect the children of Vardan Ree from their bloodthirsty elders. Now Giselle must undo her mistakes if she is to find a way home...

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CGE™

A LITTLE TRICK I PICKED UP FROM THE SHAMAN GUILD. THEY USUALLY USE IT ON WILD ANIMALS--
--LIKE, IF A RABID CARNOCEROUS COMES CHARGING INTO ONE OF THEIR VILLAGES...

...BUT APPARENTLY IT WORKS JUST AS WELL ON A SILVER-TONGUED *JUNGLE-JERK* AND HIS PACK OF *MURDERERS!*

GISELLE, PLEASE! *MISUNDERSTAND*, YOU DO!

Oh, *REALLY?*

I GUESS I SHOULD'VE JUST *GONE ALONG* WITH IT ONCE YOUR MEN STARTED *EXECUTING* EVERY MAN, WOMAN, AND CHILD--

TOLD YOU, I DID: MUD-HUNTERS ARE *NOT MEN!* THEY ARE...SOMETHING *LESS...*

LESS THAN THE PEOPLE OF VARDAN REE, WHO *SACRIFICE* THEIR OWN *CHILDREN* TO GODS THAT DON'T EVEN EXIST?!

THAT'S THE *ONLY* REASON THESE CAVEMEN SNATCHED YOUR CHILDREN: TO SAVE THEM FROM *YOU!*

THAT'S RIGHT: I *FOUND OUT* YOUR DIRTY LITTLE SECRET. WHY I DIDN'T *GLIMPSE* IT WHEN WE MERGED CONSCIOUSNESS, I DON'T KNOW.

I GUESS IT JUST WASN'T ANY *BIG DEAL* TO--

--YOUuUuu...

GISELLE...?

THE WITCH'S SPELL IS BROKEN!
LET US STRIKE BEFORE SHE CAN RECOVER!
WH-WHAT HAPPENED TO MY MAGIC?
AND... WHY CAN'T I SUMMON MORE...?
FINISH OFF THE MUD-HUNTERS! I'LL TAKE CARE OF OUR TURNCOAT GODDESS!
hkk
KLUDD
UNH!
NOW YOU WILL ANSWER TO MY "NONEXISTENT" GODS IN PERSON!
FWEET

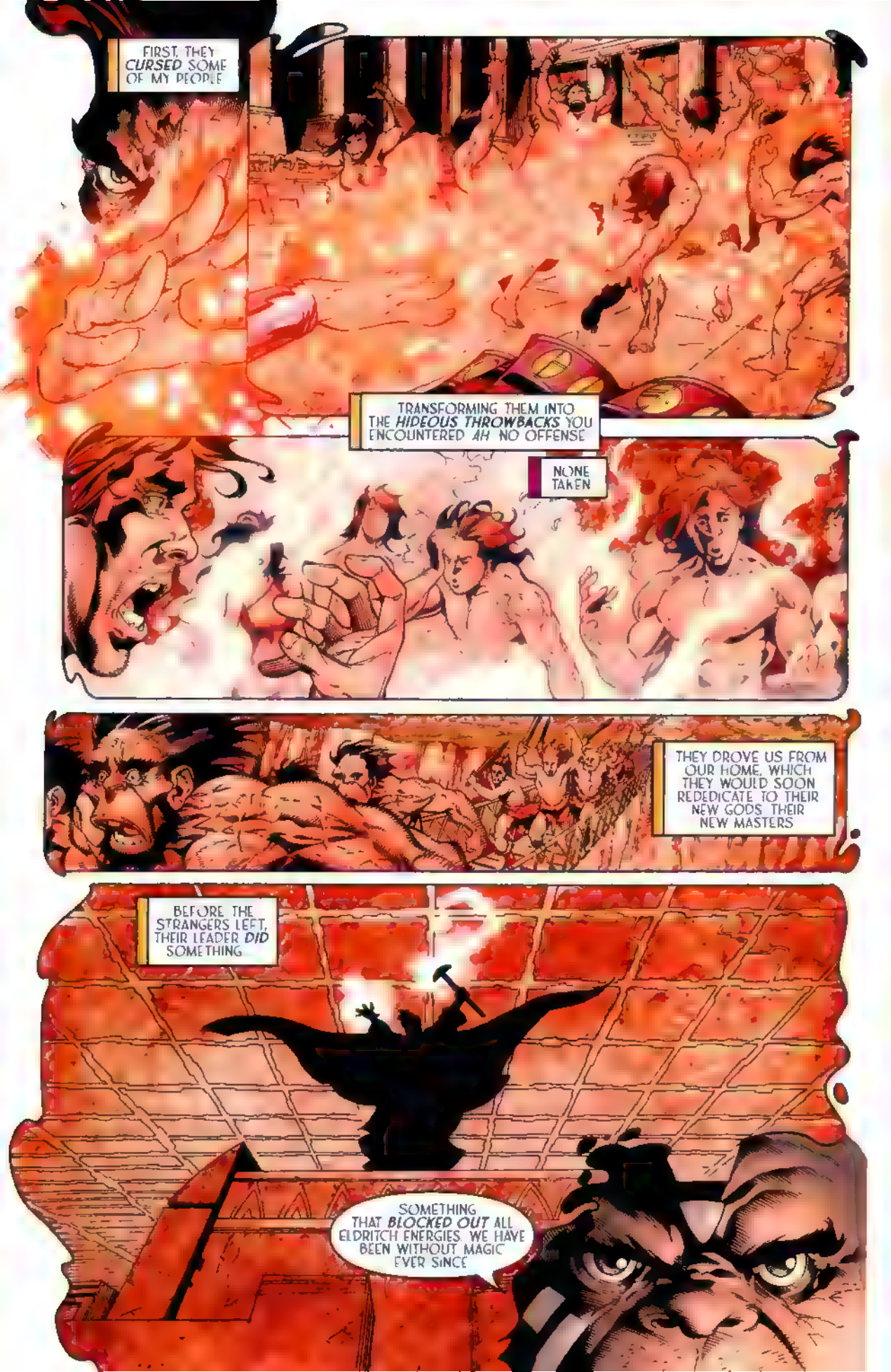
EEEEE
EEEEE
EEEEE
GRAB A WEAPON, GISELLE! WE MUST ALL NOW DEFEND OURSELVES OR FALL!
ARRHHH!
Oh, HEX! I'D GIVE ANYTHING RIGHT NOW FOR A SPELL-SPEAR OR A VORPAL SWORD!
CHOMPF
SHRIIP
KRUNCH
UNH--

INCREDIBLE. I STILL CANNOT BELIEVE HE ESCAPED.
AND LEFT US HERE TO LANGUISH--
DON'T YOU MEAN TO DIE, JINAI? THE MAGUS DIDN'T LEAVE THIS BEAST BEHIND TO KEEP US COMPANY...
HOW COULD THE MAGUS HAVE ARRANGED HIS ESCAPE WITHOUT ANY OF US CATCHING ON?
BECAUSE DECEIT AND BETRAYAL AREN'T JUST TOOLS TO THE DARK MAGI-- THEY'RE A RELIGION.
WE GREW COMPLACENT, STUCK TOGETHER LIKE THIS. WE LET OUR GUARD DOWN.
AND TO THINK I NEARLY SIDED WITH HIM AGAINST YOU. MY APOLOGIES FOR DOUBTING YOU, LeCAVALIER.
NEVER MIND THAT! CAN'T YOU FEEL IT? SOMETHING IS COMING!
SOMETHING BIG!

FWASH
There you are! Where's Giselle?!
WE...DON'T KNOW.
OUR PSYCHIC LINK WITH HER HAS BEEN SEVERED. WE FEARED SHE MIGHT BE DEAD, OR...
YOU'D BE LIKELIER TO KNOW. SPEAKING OF WHICH, HOW DID YOU GET HERE?
YES. NO OFFENSE, BUT...AREN'T YOU JUST HER PET?
You've watched everything that's happened to Giselle since the moment you got sucked inside her, and you still don't have a clue what I am...?!
Probably just as well the kid ignored half your advice, anyway!
Say...looks like you're short one Dark Magi Spirit...
And what's with the roadkill?
THE MAGUS BROKE FREE OF THE SPIRIT PLANE A SHORT TIME AGO. THIS PLANES-STALKER DELIVERED A GATE, THEN GAVE ITS LIFE TO COVER HIS ESCAPE.
So he was in cahoots with someone on Ciress...
I THINK WE CAN ALL GUESS WHO. WHAT'S MORE, HE SAID THAT GISELLE WAS TRAPPED ON A NETHER-PLANE THAT HAS BEEN CUT OFF FROM THE UNIVERSAL ENERGIES.
No magic, huh? She won't last long without using up whatever reserves she had within her...

"...that is, if she hasn't already run dry."
WHAT HAPPENED...?
oOhhh...
Oh, NO... I'M SO SORRY, ATOOK...
I SHOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO STOP THIS...
YOU WOULD HAVE ONLY DELAYED A RECKONING THAT WAS A LONG TIME COMING.
IT SADDENS ME THAT DIPLOMACY COULD NOT PREVAIL, BUT THE VARDANIANS REBUFFED ALL MY PREVIOUS OVERTURES.
WOW. YOU PICKED UP MY LANGUAGE EVEN BETTER THAN THE SACHEM DID!

OF COURSE. WE WERE NOT CURSED AS HIS PEOPLE WERE.
YOU MEAN *CURSED* AS A FIGURE OF SPEECH, RIGHT? BECAUSE WHERE I COME FROM THERE *REALLY ARE* CURSES--
HERE, AS WELL. ONCE, *TRUE MAGIC* FILLED THE SKY AND ABIDED IN THE FOREST. ONCE, OUR *WITCH DOCTORS* WIELDED GREAT POWER...
...AND THEY *USED* IT TO CREATE THE CITY OF VARDAN REE. BUT THE MYSTICAL FORCES WERE TAKEN FROM OUR WORLD SEVERAL YEARS AGO...
"ONE DAY, *STRANGERS* APPEARED.
"*POWERFUL* STRANGERS, WHOSE MYSTICAL ARTS FAR OUTSTRIPPED OURS.


FIRST, THEY CURSED SOME OF MY PEOPLE
TRANSFORMING THEM INTO THE HIDEOUS THROWBACKS YOU ENCOUNTERED AH NO OFFENSE
NONE TAKEN
THEY DROVE US FROM OUR HOME, WHICH THEY WOULD SOON REDEDICATE TO THEIR NEW GODS. THEIR NEW MASTERS
BEFORE THE STRANGERS LEFT, THEIR LEADER DID SOMETHING
SOMETHING THAT BLOCKED OUT ALL ELDRITCH ENERGIES. WE HAVE BEEN WITHOUT MAGIC EVER SINCE

OCCASIONALLY WE RAIDED VARDAN REE TO SAVE THEIR CHILDREN FROM THE SACRIFICIAL ALTAR
AFTER ALL, THEY WERE ORIGINALLY OF MY PEOPLE AND THE CHILDREN CANNOT HELP BEING *UGLY* ANY MORE THAN *YOU* CAN
Uh-huh
SOUNDS LIKE THE PEOPLE WHO CUT OFF YOUR MAGIC COME FROM CIRESS THOUGH I'VE NEVER HEARD OF A GUILD *CAPABLE* OF SUCH A THING
I'D LIKE TO GET *BACK* THERE AND FIND OUT FOR SURE CAN ANYONE *HELP* ME? I'VE KIND OF RUN OUT OF MY OWN POWER
I HAVE BEEN *THINKING* ABOUT THAT
THERE IS A *PLACE,* UP ABOVE THE TREE LINE NEAR THE SNOWY PEAKS OF THESE SACRED MOUNTAINS
YOU WILL FIND A HIDDEN PASS BETWEEN THE TWIN SUMMITS OF MOUNT TOONDA IT LEADS TO THE ANCIENT SHRINE OF ANDAR
I BELIEVE THE ANSWER TO YOUR DILEMMA AWAITS YOU THERE
WHAT EXACTLY WILL I *FIND* AT THIS SHRINE ATOOK?
ONLY WHAT YOU *BRING* WITH YOU

THANK YOU FOR THE REPORT, BROTHER THUSILS. THE TANTRIC GUILD OWES YOU MUCH FOR YOUR FAITHFUL SERVICE
AS YOU WISH, MASTER VASHUA
NOW, PLEASE LEAVE ME, AND MAKE CERTAIN THIS CHAMBER REMAINS SEALED UNTIL I EMERGE. I MUST MEDITATE NOW
STIR

ABOUT *TIME* YOU ARRIVED!
YOU WILL LEARN *NOT* TO KEEP HIM WAITING NOW *COME*
WOULD IT HAVE *KILLED* YOU TO SAY, *WELCOME* ?
THIS IS NOT AN *EASY* DECISION FOR ME, YOU KNOW
YOU ALREADY *MADE* YOUR DECISION THE NIGHT YOU ALLOWED OUR MASTERS *SUCCUBUS* TO PREY UPON YOUR ACOLYTES
OUR MASTER ?
YES, VASHUA WHETHER OR NOT YOU'VE EVEN BEEN *AWARE* OF IT, *I* HAVE BEEN PULLING *ALL* YOUR STRINGS FOR QUITE SOME TIME NOW

YOU WILL FIND, AS THE MAGUS HAS, THAT KNOWINGLY SERVING THE GEOMETER GUILD IS MUCH MORE REWARDING
THAN BEING OUR UNWITTING PAWN
WELCOME TO THE WORLD'S TRUE INNER CIRCLE OF POWER
GEOMETER GUILD ?! I'VE NEVER EVEN HEARD OF--
WITH GOOD REASON, VASHUA THEY HAVE CONCEALED THEIR EXISTENCE SINCE BEFORE THE FIRST COMING OF ANIMORA
SO THEY HAVE A TALENT FOR OBSCURITY SHOULD I BE IMPRESSED?
THE LAST FIVE CENTURIES OF HISTORY, THE GLOBAL BALANCE OF POWER, YOUR OWN RISE TO THE TOP OF THE TANTRIC GUILD ALL THESE THINGS WERE ENGINEERED BY US
MY RISE ?
THIS IS OUR LATEST MACHINATION
-SKZZ- TO NOUVEAU NEWSBREAK I'M JEAN DuMONT TONIGHT I HAVE A VERY SPECIAL REPORT
TONIGHT I WILL REVEAL TO YOU THE TRUE WHEREABOUTS OF THE ETERNAL SPIRITS OF THE SEVEN MAJOR GUILDS
AND THE IDENTITY OF THE GIRL WHO STOLE THEM!

SO, WHAT'S THE BIG HONKIN' DEAL ?
VMMMMM
Ah
SO NOT ALL THE MAGIC IN THIS BACKWARDS PLACE IS TAPPED OUT
HUUU

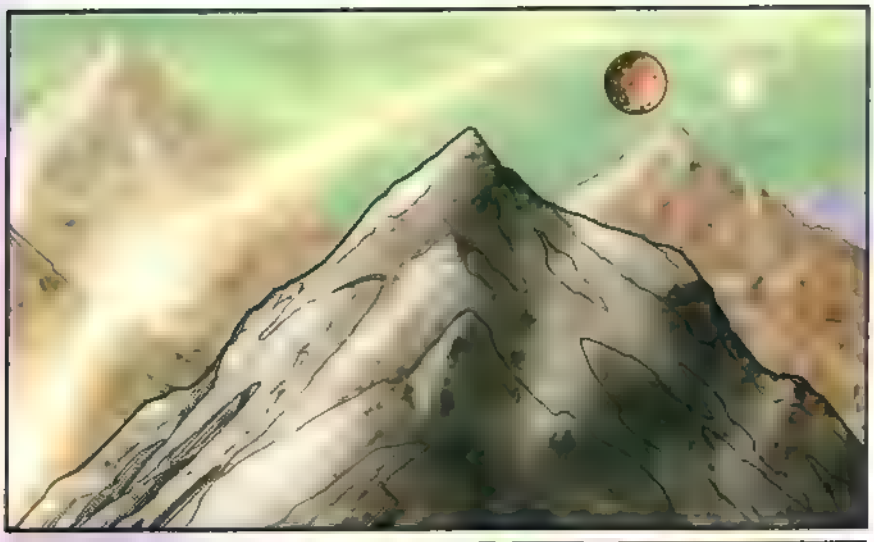
OKAY, OKAY KEEP IT TOGETHER GIRL
ATOOK CAN'T HAVE SENT ME HERE TO DIE
MAYBE THIS IS JUST A TEST OF MY BRAVERY
Ah-Toook?!
YAAAHHH!

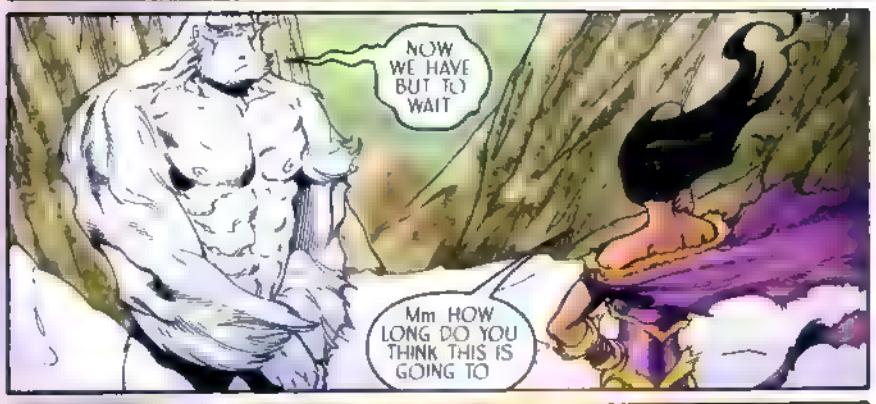
-UNGH-
PAP
SHFF
SPIT
GYAHRRR!
SEVEN SPRTS ! NOW I'VE DONE IT
WE.. F THIS S IT
THEN I'M GOIN DOWN SWINGING

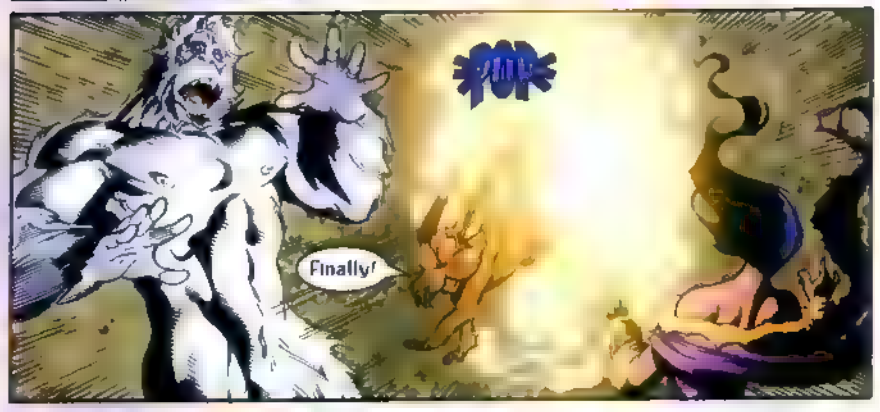
KONK
Ohhh
THAT HURT!
YOU CAN TALK ?!
OF COURSE I CAN SPEAK DID NOT ATOOK TELL YOU WHAT YOU WOULD FIND UP HERE?
um. SORTA HE SAID I'D FIND
ONLY WHAT YOU BRING WITH YOU
Oh NO
I REALLY SCREWED UP DIDN'T I ?
I, uh DID NOT COME ALL THIS WAY TO BRING YOU A FIGHT

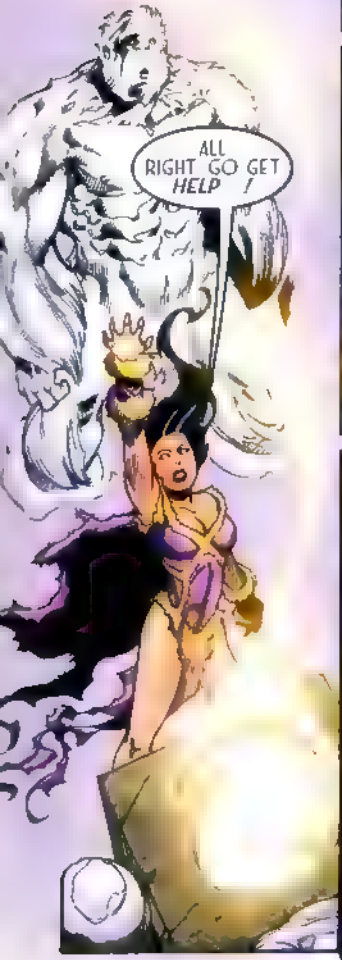
ANYHOW, YOU SCARED ME AT FIRST, BUT I'M OVER IT NOW I HOPE YOU UNDERSTAND
WE JUST THIS WAS JUST A BAD FIRST IMPRESSION BUT SMART PEOPLE GOOD PEOPLE CAN GET PAST THAT SORT OF THING.
RIGHT ?
A NOBLE PRONOUNCEMENT YOUNG LADY IF NOT THE MOST ARTICULATE
COULD YOUR OBTUSE APPEARANCE BELIE SOME HIDDEN WISDOM?
AS IF!
IF I WAS REALLY WISE, I'D HAVE FIGURED OUT QUICKER THAT IF THOSE BUTT UGLY MUD-HUNTERS WERE ACTUALLY THE NEXT STEP UP, INTELLIGENCE WISE FROM THE HOTTIES OF VARDAN REE
THEN SOMETHING THAT LOOKS LIKE YOU MUST BE THE SUPER-GENIUS OF THIS PLACE
A TRIUMPH OF INDUCTIVE REASONING THOUGH IT DOES CALL TO MIND THAT BEAUTY IS SUBJECTIVE
ATOOK DISPATCHED YOU HERE, KNOWING THAT I STAND GUARD OVER THE SOLE REMAINING REPOSITORY OF MAGIC IN THIS REALM.
MANY CENTURIES AGO, ANDAR HIMSELF ERECTED THIS SHRINE NO ONE KNEW WHY, UNTIL THE STRANGERS ARRIVED AND PLUNGED US INTO A MYSTICAL DARK AGE
THE SHRINE SAVED ONE LAST ERG OF ARCANE ENERGY, THOUGH I AM STILL UNSURE WHAT GOOD IT DOES TO HAVE IT LOCKED AWAY WHERE NO ONE CAN USE IT
ONE THING I DO KNOW SHOULD THAT SPARK EVER BE EXHAUSTED, THEN ALL HOPE OF RESTORING MAGIC TO THE WORLD WILL BE LOST
WELL, IF I CAN'T RECHARGE MYSELF WITH WHAT'S IN THERE, THEN I'M ALREADY ONE OF THE HOPELESS
SEE, I WAS HOPING IT WOULD BE ENOUGH TO OPEN A GATEWAY BACK HOME TO CIRESS.

OF COURSE, IF I USED UP YOUR LAST SHRED OF MAGIC TO GET WHAT I WANT THEN I WOULDN'T DESERVE IT IN THE FIRST PLACE, WOULD I?
'CIRESS,' YOU SAY? ANDAR CAME FROM A REALM CALLED CIRESS. AS DID THE STRANGERS WHO CURSED US MORE RECENTLY
T SEEMS WE'VE BEEN VISITED BY YOUR PEOPLE MORE THAN ONCE I WONDER
YOU MAY LACK THE REQUISITE POWER TO TRANSPORT YOURSELF BACK HOME, BUT WHAT ABOUT TRANSMITTING A DISTRESS CALL?
I THINK WE MAY HAVE POWER TO SPARE FOR A SIMPLE BEACON
OKAY BUT WHO SHOULD I CONTACT?
DO NOT DIRECT YOUR CALL AT ANYONE IN PARTICULAR JUST BROADCAST YOUR PLIGHT-- YOUR DIRE NEED-- ACROSS THE PLANES
AND YOUR MOST POWERFUL ALLY WILL HEAR YOUR SUMMONS
SFFF SKZZ--




NOW WE HAVE BUT TO WAIT
Mm HOW LONG DO YOU THINK THIS IS GOING TO


POP
Finally!


ALL RIGHT GO GET HELP !

SKITTER?!
Um, MISTER SNOW MONSTER ? YOU DID SAY MOST POWERFUL ?
Oh MOST CERTAINLY THOUGH, NEVER IN MY WILDEST DREAMS DID I DARE HOPE THAT YOU COUNTED AMONG YOUR ALLIES
THE GREAT AND POWERFUL ANDAR!

YOU SET UP THIS SHRINE ?!
Ages ago I'll explain later
cuz we gotta get you home right now!
POP
Hmm HE COULD HAVE AT LEAST SAID HELLO
SMASH
I might've never found you, sealed away like that
BUT WHERE WAS I?
A sub-stratum of Ciress. The Plane of Missing Links, if you wanna give it a name
WHAT IN THE FOUR MOONS IS GOING ON HERE?!
Looks like the start of a riot, kid! Same things happening at every major Guild Cathedral on Ciress!
Your secret is out! Everyone knows you took the Guild Spirits and they wanna bring down the Masters for covering it up!

STORYTELLERS

Tony Bedard
WRITER

Aaron Lopresti
PENCILER

Matt Ryan
INKER

Wil Quintana
COLORIST

Troy Peteri
LETTERER

Mark Alessi
PUBLISHER & CEO

Gina M. Villa
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

Michael A. Beattie
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Jennifer Hernandez
GENERAL COUNSEL

Tony Panaccio
VICE PRESIDENT
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

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COMMUNICATIONS

Courtland Whited
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Gabo Mendoza
INTERNET SERVICES DIRECTOR

Charles Decker
DIRECTOR OF
PRODUCTION CONTROL

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CONTROLLER

Brandon Peterson
VICE PRESIDENT
SPECIAL PROJECTS

Barbara Kesel
HEAD WRITER

Bart Sears
ART DIRECTOR

Michael Atiyeh
Butch Guice
Dave Lanphear
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Laura Martin
Mark Pennington
Andy Smith
ASSISTANT
ART DIRECTORS

Pam Davies
VICE PRESIDENT
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PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR
ADVERTISING/WEB

Erin Flanagan
WEB DESIGNER

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PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR
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FREELANCE COORDINATOR

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Issue #34
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KEY ISSUE

MERIDIAN®

MERIDIAN #34

Written by Barbara Kesel,
art by Steve McNiven & Tom Simmons,
colors by Morry Hollowell

A Key Issue! Sephie of Meridian is a teen-aged girl from a fantasy world beset by real-world problems. Receiving the Sigil propelled her into a dizzying whirl of grown-up decisions and responsibilities. Join Sephie as she sets her crew on a course that will lead to the most difficult choice of her young life.

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MARK OF CHARON #1 (of 5)

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